‘AND I SLIP INTO IT UNAWARES’: THE FUNCTION OF BILINGUALISM IN KOBINA SEKYI’S *THE BLINKARDS* (1915)

ABSTRACT: In this essay, I discuss the function of bilingualism in Kobina Sekyi’s *The Blinkards* (1915). The play, written in both English and Fanti, satirizes the Anglophile tendencies of the Cape Coast’s indigenous bourgeoisie, and extant criticism has tended to focus upon the comedic effect of this class’s use and misuse of English. In this article, however, I argue that the bilingual nature of *The Blinkards*—and, indeed, the linguistic strategies that characterise such bilingualism (i.e. code-switching, indigenization, etc.)—performs, in the context of Sekyi’s nationalism, a profoundly glottopolitical function. Furthermore, I argue that *The Blinkards* serves to demonstrate the ways in which multilingual colonial and postcolonial works can help to redress the Eurocentric tendencies of contemporary critical debates as to mono- and multilingual practices in a globalised world.

KEYWORDS: *THE BLINKARDS*, KOBINA SEKYI, GHANA, THEATRE, NATIONALISM, BILINGUALISM

I speak English to soften my harsher native tongue;

It matters not if often I speak the Fanti wrong.[1]

“When I was about six years old,” remembers Kobina Sekyi (born William Essuman–Gwira Sekyi) in one of his lectures entitled *The Meaning of the Expression ‘Thinking in English’* (1934), the transcripts of which are held at the National Archives of Ghana, “I was made to commence lessons in reading and writing of both English and Fanti, and my first teacher,” he adds, “was my mother.”[2] Yet, the presence of English as an influence upon the Cape Coast’s native bourgeoisie had implications for the manner in which this class perceived its own culture. Indeed, according to James Gibbs, Kobina Sekyi had been “known for his love of all things English” during his studies at the Mfantsipim School, in Cape Coast. Gibbs adds that, “in a school photograph […] he is immortalised wearing a woollen suit,” an emblem of

Englishness (Gibbs, *Nkyin–Kyin* 38). Nevertheless, it was during his time at the University of London that Sekyi came to reconsider his previous position regarding both Fanti culture and language: “the more European philosophy he read,” states K. A. B. Jones-Quartey in his article ‘Kobina Sekyi: A Fragment of Biography’, “the more African he became” (74). This change in perception is rendered the most explicit in his socio-linguistic lectures on Fanti, in which he provokingly states:

> I do not endorse the views often expressed here, by those who cannot read or write Fanti, and who certainly are not capable translators, that our language is defective for expression of English ideas or expressions, especially in the presentation of abstract thought or scientific matter. […] It seems to me that those who qualify languages as rude or polished are afflicted by a confusion of ideas.[3]

However, what he came to express so poignantly in 1934 had already been a distinctive element of his literary project since the mid 1910s. In his most famous work, *The Blinkards* (1915), Kobina Sekyi draws upon his experiences as an English-educated member of the Cape Coast bourgeoisie in order to create a satirical depiction of the Anglophilic tendencies of his own class, consumed by a desire to act, and indeed think, as Englishmen. In fact, *The Blinkards*’ concern with the subject of cultural imperialism in the Gold Coast was shared by numerous contemporaneous publications, as can be noted from the circulation of such pamphlets as fellow nationalist Reverend Attoh Ahuma’s *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness* (1911), which contained a chapter on the ‘Whiteman and his West African Understudy’.[4] The interest in the Fanti language that Sekyi would profess in his later political writings had already been made evident in his decision to use both English and Fanti throughout *The Blinkards*, and the political intent behind the inherent bilingualism of his play can be gleaned from an analysis of the linguistic strategies at work in the text.[5]

It is true that critics of Kobina Sekyi’s literary oeuvre—such as Gareth Griffiths, Stephanie Newell, and James Gibbs—have often commented, though briefly, on the bilingual

nature of *The Blinkards.* Griffiths remarks, in passing, in his study entitled *African Literatures in English: East and West* (2000), that Sekyi's play

> is unique […] in that it weaves English […] into dramatic interaction with Fanti. Almost a third of the total dialogue is in Fanti, making this text the earliest play to insist on the audience dealing with the multi-linguistic reality of West African culture. (39)

Further, he affirms that, in performance, the bilingual strategies employed in *The Blinkards* "would dramatise the ways in which English was always only one element in the language continuum inhabited by these would-be English imitators of the creolised Cape Coast" and, as such, Sekyi's work "offered a significant early model of successful multi-linguistic dialogue, which West African plays were only to return to after many decades" (39). Griffiths provides, in this statement, a much-needed historicization of the bi- and multilingual strategies employed by colonial and postcolonial Ghanaian authors alike. However, he fails to appreciate Kobina Sekyi's nuanced employment of such linguistic strategies, the extent to which these inform both the satirical and political objectives of his work, and, moreover, the text's own signalling of these strategies: "I find it easier to speak English," admits Mr Onyimzde, "and I slip into it unawares when I am speaking Fanti." (*The Blinkards* 35)

Stephanie Newell, on the other hand, limits her discussion concerning Sekyi's use of language in *The Blinkards*, included in her extensive analysis of *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* (2002), to Mrs Borɔfosɛm's *misuse* of English (165). In a similar manner, studies such as Éliane Utudjian Saint-André's *Le Théâtre Anglophone du Nigeria, du Ghana et de la Sierra Leone* (2007), which contain focused discussions on the uses of language in *The Blinkards*, consistently forgo analyses of the bilingual aspects of Sekyi's work in favor of closer investigations into the several "englishes"—to use the important term popularized in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), referring to the "various ways in which English has been employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 8)—manifested therein.[6] In this paper, therefore, I propose to address the as yet

critically neglected topic of bilingualism in Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* and its significance in the context of Sekyi's ideas of linguistic nationalism in colonial Ghana.

In light of the bourgeoning critical interest in notions of mono– and multilingualism in an age of globalization, I aim to situate this discussion in the context of recent works, such as Yasemin Yildiz's *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Post–Monolingual Condition* (2012), which proposes to examine, albeit from a primarily European perspective, what she terms the "monolingual paradigm" and the current "multilingual turn" in linguistics in the West. Indeed, this paper seeks to redress, through an extended analysis of the bilingual strategies employed in Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards*, the Eurocentric tendencies pervading recent criticism on multilingual practices, which erase the complex linguistic terrain of numerous postcolonial nations. In accordance with the linguist Setiono Sugiharto, I aim to demonstrate, through the example of *The Blinkards*, that the so-called "multilingual turn", "unveiled as a celebratory gunfire […] to pave the way for practicing multilingualism, fails to accurately capture the essence of common linguistic practices […] in a multilingual periphery country," such as colonial Cape Coast or modern-day Ghana (Sugiharto, 'The Multilingual Turn in Applied Linguistics?' 417–418). For example, in *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, Yasemin Yildiz defines the phenomenon of monolingualism "as much more than a simple quantitative term designating the presence of just one language. Instead," she continues,

> it constitutes a key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life, from the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities to the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as of imagined collectives such as cultures and nations. (2)

The conception of monolingualism as a "structuring principle", though useful in relation to the European countries on which Yildiz's analysis is based, presupposes that the "monolingual paradigm" exerts itself upon all multilingual terrains. It is important to note, however, that "the back-and-forth movement" between mono- and multilingualism (or, as she terms it, postmonolingualism) which "characterizes linguistic constellations" in Europe does

not lend itself as a framework for understanding postcolonial multilingual—or, to use a more precise term, diglossic—terrains such as that of Ghana (5).[7]

Indeed, works such as Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* complicate Yildiz's use of the "monolingual paradigm" as a suitable model for understanding the emergence of bilingual writing, particularly when considering postcolonial linguistic terrains. Though correct in her assertion that "it is displacement that opens up the possibility of writing in more than one language," Yildiz's conception of displacement as a movement "outside the nation-state" is limited to a European context (113–114). In postcolonial contexts, displacement, conceived not as a movement outside the nation-state, but rather as a movement *into* the form of the nation-state, is what permits such linguistic juxtaposition as occurs in Sekyi's play. The imposition of English, as official language and lingua franca, upon the (often) multilingual terrains of Britain's colonies in the African continent did not supplant multilingualism, but instead forced the hierarchical coexistence of received and receiving (indigenous) languages. According to Salikoko Mufwene and Cécile Vigouroux, "different colonization styles," but also colonization itself, have resulted in "different socioeconomic structures, [and] therefore different interactional and linguistic regimes, which have engendered different dynamics of language competition between the languages in contact" (3). In the case of Ghana, as opposed to that of the European nations referenced in Yasemin Yildiz's study, the introduction of English has had little effect on the pre-colonial linguistic landscape, the English language being "associated with functions in which [it] hardly compete[s] with the indigenous languages," such as Fanti (Mufwene and Vigouroux 27). Nevertheless, despite the fact that the multiple indigenous languages at use in Ghana constitute the "privileged medi[a] of communication" (Zabus 28), the Ghanaian linguistic landscape is one of acute diglossia: that is, a situation of linguistic coexistence in which the "functions of communication are

distributed in a binary," or hierarchical, "fashion, between a culturally prestigious language […] and another language, generally widely spoken but devoid of prestige" (Zabus 13).

As such, in this paper, I will argue that the bilingual nature, and the linguistic strategies that characterise such bilingualism, of Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* perform, in the context of his linguistic nationalism, a profoundly glottopolitical function. Furthermore, I will argue that *The Blinkards* serves to demonstrate the ways in which multilingual colonial and postcolonial works—or those that reproduce the diglossia resulting from the colonial encounter, particularly in West Africa—can help to redress the Eurocentric tendencies of contemporary critical debates as to mono– and multilingual practices in the world.

Though written in 1915, the first record of Kobina Sekyi's satire of the colonial Cape Coast's native bourgeoisie, *The Blinkards*, having been performed can be traced to an article published in the 19 October 1916 issue of *The Gold Coast Nation*, in which it is written that the play

> was produced at the Govt School-Room, Elmina Rd, on Saturday evening the 14th instant at 8.30, with great success. Only the first two acts were performed the other two having been deferred owing to the tardy shifting of the scenes due to the want of proper apparatus which could not permit the entire production at one performance.

This is confirmed in another article, published in the 28 October 1916 issue of *The Gold Coast Leader*, in which the editor of the newspaper states that "the remaining portion of the 'Blinkards' […] was performed last Saturday evening at the Government Schoolroom and the fairly crowded audience broke off seemingly well entertained as on the first occasion of the Play." Though in his Introduction to the 1974 Rex Collings/Heinemann edition of *The Blinkards* researcher Jabez Ayo Langley claims that Sekyi's work was first performed in 1915, the reviews in *The Gold Coast Nation* and in *The Gold Coast Leader* make it clear that *The Blinkards* was premiered in two parts, over two performances (on 14 October and 21 October) in 1916.[8] References to *The Blinkards*, particularly in local newspapers such as the

aforementioned *Gold Coast Leader* and *Gold Coast Nation*, persisted throughout the months subsequent to its premiere in October 1916. An editorial, published in the 10 February 1917 issue of *The Gold Coast Leader* is of particular relevance to this discussion: in it, the newspaper's Editor writes that, along with the recent publication of such works in Fanti as Reverend Gaddiel Robert Acquaah's *Akyikyiwire–Ndwim, or Songs of Comfort* and S. H. Brew's own *Fanti Grammar*,

> [w]e should like to see the brilliant author of the 'Blinkards' render the drama into the vernacular for the edification of Fanti speaking folk. We understand that we may look forward to an early publication of that work, and we trust a translation will follow in due course.

While Stephanie Newell has interpreted this remark to mean that *The Blinkards* "was not originally written in a combination of Fanti and English, as literary scholars have often assumed, but solely in English," I would argue that, read in context, there is no indication of the Editor's having implied that *The Blinkards* had, at one point, been a monolingual text (Newell, 'Newspapers, New Spaces, New Writers' 12). Rather, in light of the discussion concerning "the rapid increase of books in the vernacular, a fruitful source being the translation of standard works into our language," developed in the preceding paragraphs, the Editor seems to express his hope that a *mono*lingual version of *The Blinkards*, entirely in Fanti, be made available.

Nevertheless, the manuscript of *The Blinkards* used by Rex Collings and James Currey in developing the first printed edition of Kobina Sekyi's work—published by both Rex Collings and Heinemann, as part of the African Writers Series, in 1974—contained the disputed sections in Fanti, as well as translations of these sections into English, provided by Sekyi himself. This is made clear in the correspondence, throughout 1971–72, between Collings and Currey pertaining to the publication of *The Blinkards*, in particular a letter signed by Currey, dated 5 March 1971, wherein he inquires as to "what to do with the Fanti." In addition, he proposes that "it would be better to have the English translation after each

speech," though it seems both editors ultimately opted for the more convenient, albeit more expensive, presentation of the English translations opposite the lines in Fanti.[9] The issue is also referenced in a reader's report, that of Paul Ansah, a member of staff at the University of Ghana at Legon, dated 1971, in which he expresses his concern over the bilingual nature of the manuscript, and its implications for the printed text and the play in performance alike:

> …it is inconceivable that all the bits in Fanti can be retained without considerably diminishing the impact of the play on those who do not speak or read Fanti, and this will include the majority of the people who will read the play or see it performed.[10]

Though he acknowledges that the "suppression of the Fanti original" might often "make nonsense of the remarks that immediately follow" those lines, the solution Ansah proposes to what he terms the "problem" of the "inclusion of Fanti in fairly large doses" is that, in certain circumstances, Sekyi's own translations of Fanti into English "can be used without loss of dramatic effect." Perhaps it should have occurred to Ansah—although such issues might have been deemed secondary during the editing phases of *The Blinkards*' publication—that such unintelligibility, at least where it concerned monolingual English-speaking audiences, was intended as part of both Sekyi's satire and linguistic nationalism, advocated in such documents as *The Meaning of the Expression 'Thinking in English'*.

Indeed, the pervasive use of Fanti throughout the work—constituting, according to Gareth Griffiths, a third of the play's total dialogue (39)—can be approached with the notion of the Untranslatable, developed in Emily Apter's recent study *Against World Literature* (2013) and defined "not as pure difference in opposition to the always translatable […] but as a linguistic form of creative failure with homeopathic uses" (20). Though the adjective "homeopathic" is, arguably, unhelpful, Apter's conceptualization of the Untranslatable as having therapeutic, or restorative, properties is useful in understanding the employment of bilingual strategies in Kobina Sekyi's work against the hegemonic dominance of the English language. In fact, the function of the Untranslatable as an "intransigent nub of meaning that

triggers endless translating in response to its resistant singularity" is made acutely manifest throughout *The Blinkards* (Apter 235). The character of Nã Sompa, in Act Two, uses the Fanti word "moho", offered as "fooled" in the accompanying English translation. Nevertheless, a footnote included in the 1974 Rex Collings/Heinemann and the 1997 Readwide/Heinemann editions, observes that it has been "difficult to render the expression accurately in English," and exposes the issues inherent to attempts at translating seeming Untranslatables such as "moho" (71; 79). Furthermore, it demonstrates the forms in which the "resistant singularity" of the Untranslatable functions as a refusal of the "domestication" or "reconstitution", to use Lawrence Venuti's terminology, of the Fanti original for English-speaking readerships (209).[11] It notes, presenting multiple potential translations of the word "moho":

> * Or, better spoiled, perhaps?
> a [so] grossly slighted or b insulted. Literally, made or treated like a person of no account. (*The Blinkards* 78)

Whilst the inclusion of English translations of the lines in Fanti might indicate a concession on Sekyi's part, through the domestication of his text, to monolingual English-speaking audiences, such instances of the instrumentalization of the Untranslatable, so powerfully emphasized in the footnote cited above, correspond to what Elleke Boehmer has understood as the colonial and postcolonial writer's endeavor "to transform their experience of cultural schizophrenia"—the result of which lends itself as the object of Sekyi's satire—"into a restorative dream of home, a healing myth of origin, or a consolatory lyric combining diverse melodies" (112).

Moreover, culture-specific Untranslatables (i.e. traditional Fanti dishes, activities, and ceremonies), which function, according to Bill Ashcroft, as "device[s] for conveying [a] sense of cultural distinctiveness," are employed throughout *The Blinkards* to a similar restorative purpose against the encroachment of the English, their language, their customs

and institutions (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 63). For example, when Mr Tsiba, in Act One, introduces his daughter, Miss Tsiba, to Mrs Borɔfosɛm—who is to be her tutor in all matters pertaining to English life, her surname being Fanti for 'Englishness' (Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* 160)—he states:

> I want you to make her English. She don't like stays: she don't like boots; she want to go out in native dress. She like *fufu* too much; she like *dɔkon* too much. I know white ladies can't chop *fufu* or *dɔkun*, because their middle is too small with stays: then she will eat nice European things. (21)

The use of Fanti words, or indeed Untranslatables, such as "fufu" and "dɔkon"/"dɔkun", unaccompanied, both in print form and in performance, by explanatory glosses, fulfils one of three different functions of code-switching, according to Shahrzad Mahootian's recent article on mixed-language discourses: that is, "to highlight an ethnic identity as a sort of foot in the door of the social order" (199). Indeed, it fulfils such function in three main forms. First, the cultural specificity of such words as "fufu" and "dɔkon"/"dɔkun" (as well as of "enamnam" and "mbapa", left untranslated in the Fanti to English translations), and the exclusiveness of intelligibility which that implies, is itself a restorative "foot in the door" of linguistic imperialism. Second, the reinforcement of a Fanti "ethnic identity" through the use of code-switches between the latter and English is also made manifest, though graphically, in the foreignizing, or Othering, italicization of the Fanti words embedded in the English text. Lastly, such reinforcement of "cultural distinctiveness" can be gleaned from the reintroduction of Fanti graphemes such as "ɔ" in "dɔkon"/"dɔkun" in the 1997 Readwide/Heinemann edition—whose sections in Fanti, according to James Gibbs, underwent a further orthographic modernization in comparison with the 1974 Rex Collings/ Heinemann edition (Gibbs, 'A Remarkable Find' 14)—thus emphasising "the (posited) experiential gap which lies at the heart of any cross-cultural text" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 65). Nevertheless, the use of Untranslatables throughout *The Blinkards* performs a dual satiric, but single political, function: it draws not only the reader (or the audience) "into an

active engagement with the horizons of," and thus their exclusion from, "the culture in which these terms have meaning," but also potential directors, who are faced with a comparable use of Untranslatables (i.e., "ntɛ", "ɔware", "birefi", "nkwansɛn") in Kobina Sekyi's stage directions (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 64).

The effect of Sekyi's deliberate unintelligibility, however, becomes even clearer onstage. In the Ghanaian production of *The Blinkards*, directed by George Andoh-Wilson and staged at the Ridge Park (now called Efua Sutherland Children's Park) in Accra throughout the last months of 1975, an attempt was made by the director himself to reduce the work's occasional linguistic impenetrability (Gibbs, 'A Remarkable Find' 13). Namely, according to James Gibbs, the lines in Fanti consigned to the characters of Nana Katawerwa and Grandfather Akodee—both of which, along with Nã Sompa, function as emblems of traditional pre-colonial Fanti culture—in Act Three were performed in their respective English translations.[12] Andoh-Wilson's decision to suppress, as per Paul Ansah's earlier recommendation, the Fanti original in favor of its more accessible English translations not only betrays the political aims of Sekyi's instrumentalization of the Untranslatable, but also reveals—though ironically—the inherence of bilingualism to Sekyi's work. For example, Grandfather Akodee opens his speech, delivered during Miss Tsiba and Mr Okadu's wedding reception, by stating that

> Ɔnam dɛ hom a wɔwɔ ha nyina yɛ Mfantsefo ntsi, *(Cries of 'no Fanti, please', 'this is European affair')* merekasa Mfantse. Mfantse na sɛ wɔkã wɔ ha a, fo a murubotu wɔ ha yi, sɛ mfaso bi wɔ mu a, binom bɛfa. (119)

These lines, however, were rendered in Andoh–Wilson's production of *The Blinkards* in their translated versions, provided by Kobina Sekyi:

> Because all who are at this gathering are Fantis, (…) I will speak in Fanti. It is only when the advice I am about to give is given in Fanti that anyone is likely to profit by any valuable counsel it may contain. (118)

The decision to use the English translations, in order to increase non-Fanti speakers' comprehension of the scene, is indeed sacrificial to the characterization of both Nana Katawerwa—who claims, in Act Three, that "those who are satisfied with their customs […] are pleasing in the eyes of God"—and Grandfather Akodee, as well as to their function as vehicles for the nationalist message of *The Blinkards* (144). The inherent paradox of Grandfather Akodee's lines being delivered in English, driven almost ad absurdum as he claims to "speak in Fanti," was not lost on such members of the audience as James Gibbs. It could be said, however, that the loss of dramatic effect in Andoh–Wilson's production is perhaps atoned for by the extent to which such an apparent failure evidences the intent behind Kobina Sekyi's use of the Untranslatable.

Nevertheless, the uses of Fanti throughout *The Blinkards*, and indeed of bilingual strategies in general, are made manifest even at moments when Kobina Sekyi attempts to foreground the ways in which culture might be translatable, as opposed to *un*translatable, and thus serve to demonstrate that the wider political concerns of his work are enacted at the level of the word itself. The colonial and postcolonial writer operating within diglossic linguistic landscapes such as that of Ghana must, according to Chantal Zabus, negotiate between "mother tongue" and "other tongue", which constitute "apparently irreconcilable sets of elements—foreign and indigenous, which *in vivo* have remained separate" (3). This negotiation, states Zabus, has given rise to the establishment of a palimpsestic "third code", or "interlanguage", which emerges from the encounter between "mother" and "other" tongues, and functions as an "indigenized medium conceived *in vitro*" (2, 3–4). This medium permits, therefore, not only the "imported language [to] carry the indigenous culture," but also the indigenous language—as in the case of *The Blinkards*—to carry the imported, or imposed, culture (4). This process of "indigenization" is defined by Zabus as a process of "decolonization in the third register"—a process through which the postcolonial author

endeavors to make indigenous "concepts, thought-patterns, and linguistic features" bear upon the colonizer or "ex-colonizer's language" (8, 3). The use of this process in *The Blinkards* represents an attempt to show not only the extent to which colonial inheritances have been integrated into Fanti, but, further, to show that the Fanti language has not been sacrificed in order to accommodate received European concepts. For example, the use of "buukuu" (or "book") by Nyamekyɛ in Act One, and of "skɔla" (or "scholar") by Mr Tsiba in Act Two, both function as "site[s] of pull between mother tongue and other tongue" (Zabus 8; Sekyi, *The Blinkards* 5, 79). However, whilst Zabus claims that such verbal palimpsests betray the presence, "behind the scriptural authority of the European language, [of] the earlier, imperfectly erased remnants of the African language," here the opposite seems to happen: that is, the influence of the English language can be glimpsed behind a veil of indigenization (2–3).

Indeed, instances of palimpsestic word formations abound throughout *The Blinkards*: besides "buukuu" and "skɔla", one encounters words such as "skuul" and "skuul-meses" meaning "school" and "school-mistress", "petkoot" meaning "petticoat", "sigyar" meaning "cigar", and so on and so forth. Perhaps the most significant case of such verbal palimpsests can be traced to Nã Sompa's employment of the word "lɔya", rather than its English equivalent "lawyer", used (almost) without exception throughout Sekyi's work (83). The character of Nã Sompa, in a similar manner to Nana Katawerwa and Grandfather Akodee, functions as an emblem of the preservation of Fanti culture against the cultural imperialism promoted by the British Empire. As such, Nã Sompa's use of the word "lɔya" in its indigenized form constitutes, rather than a mere appropriation of a foreign word, an active refusal of its English equivalent "lawyer". Nã Sompa's preference towards the indigenized "lɔya" corresponds to Peter Vakunta's recent definition of "indigenization", as a form of "writing with colonial antecedents in complex gestures of resistance and de-identification"—

in other words, “an imaginative site of resistance and transformation that ultimately demonstrates a form of decolonization” (46). The presence of such verbal palimpsests in the play echoes Kobina Sekyi’s own assertion, in *The Meaning of the Expression ‘Thinking in English’*, that those who believe Fanti to be “defective for expression of English ideas or expressions […] have not considered the extreme malleability of our language […] in which it is easy to make neat verbal combinations to express new ideas.”[13]

In this light, the word “memmpractise”, employed by Mrs Borɔfosɛm in Act One, constitutes another occasion in which the “third code” or “interlanguage” resulting from the contact between Fanti and English manifests itself. Mrs Borɔfosɛm, in her attempt to recall the words to a song she had learned during her visit to England, exclaims in Fanti: “Ei! Ndaansa yi memmpractise ndwom a ber a mowɔ Aborɔkyir no wɔsee me dɛ montow no,” which is translated as “Just fancy! I do not now practise the songs I was told to sing, when I was in England” (6–7). In accordance with Reverend J. G. Christaller’s *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language*, compiled during one of his Evangelical missions to the Gold Coast in the 1880s, the letter “m” (or, indeed, double “m”) is often used as a prefix to stems beginning with the letters “p”, “f”, “m”, and “b”, as in the case of the English verb “practise”, in order to indicate “all negative forms of the verb” (291), which is made clear in the translation of “memmpractise” as “I do not […] practise” (Sekyi, *The Blinkards* 6). Furthermore, in Fanti, the pronoun—in this instance, the singular first person pronoun “me”, equivalent to the English pronoun “I”—is also affixed to the verb: as such, the prefix “me-” attached to the verb “mmpractise” is indicative of the person of the verb (Christaller 24). It becomes evident, thus, that Mrs Borɔfosɛm’s use of the English verb “practise” has been inflected by the grammatical demands of the Fanti language or, in other words, “relexified”, which Susan Arndt, building on Zabus’s redefinition of Loreto Todd’s concept of “relexification”, extends to include the “transfer of syntactic structures” and of

“morphological characteristics of the underlying African language onto the English language” (Arndt 161).[14] Perhaps more so than the palimpsestic “buukuu” or “skɔla”, “memmpractise” in its relexified form evidences the collision between the languages in contact and the emergence of a third code, which permits the indigenous language to “carry the imported culture”.

In a similar manner, the words “carpenternyi” and “ɔablackmail”—used, respectively, by Mr Onyimdzi in Act One and by Dr Onwieyie in Act Three—enact this process of linguistic indigenization, by means of which the indigenous language is able, not to borrow, but rather to adopt and nativise European concepts (29, 101). For example, in the word “carpenternyi”, the Fanti suffix “-nyi” (equivalent to the Akan suffix “-fú”) which, according to William Everett Welmers, denotes “members of a class or occupation,” is attached to the English noun “carpenter” (188). The cases of “memmpractise”, “carpenternyi”, and “ɔablackmail” at use in *The Blinkards* demonstrate, therefore, that “the sociopolitical, hegemonic importance of the European language does not exist,” according to Zabus, “*in esse*, in that the European language does not have in its morphology an innate ability to dominate” (17). In fact, these cases illustrate that the “glottophagia”, to use Louis–Jean Calvet’s important term, inherent to colonialism’s project of linguistic imperialism as a mode of hegemonic dominance, is a product not of language relations per se, but rather of social relations (Calvet 30). Indeed, though it is true that indigenous languages “can [themselves] be ‘devoured’ in the process of indigenization,” in *The Blinkards*, the neologistic “memmpractise”, “carpenternyi”, and “ɔablackmail” suggest that the “devouring” can go both ways (Zabus 17). Insofar as these processes of indigenization show how English words can be subsumed into the structures of Fanti grammar, they demonstrate how language itself, at a local level, can be a site of resistance and decolonization.

However, in spite of the obvious moments when English words are either indigenized or relexified within the Fanti speech, there are, throughout *The Blinkards*, relevant instances in which Kobina Sekyi opts to use English words without their having undergone either of these processes. For example, in Act One, Mrs Borɔfosɛm's lines in Fanti are interspersed with words in English, which, in contrast with the aforementioned "buukuu" and "memmpractise", refuse indigenization:

> *(Stopping and turning round in seat)* Ɔye me dɛ nyimpa a ɔabɔ abow mu no ofura tam. Se no dɛ onkesi no ho. *(Exit Nyamekyɛ R.)* Ɔhyɛ atar a, se no dɛ omnia *bell* no. Moronnhwehwɛ tamfuranyi biara ma ɔdze n'ananadze fi aabɛyɛ me *carpet* do, na oeebotutu ntafi wɔ mo sor ha. *(Goes on practising)* (7)

The word "bell", despite being given a referential equivalent in Christaller's *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language* as "ɔdɔn", and the word "carpet", which has its own indigenized form in Fanti as "kapɛt", are maintained in the text in their respective English versions, with foreignizing italicizations, in order to emphasize their association with English culture (Christaller 90). Unlike the words "practise", "carpenter", and "blackmail", the English terms "bell" and "carpet" have not been "devoured" by Fanti, insofar as they are perceived to lie beyond the scope of what Fanti culture should adopt and nativise from the English. As such, the maintenance of these words in their English forms does not indicate that they resist indigenization or a "glottophagia" from Fanti, but rather that they are to be refused not only from the Fanti vocabulary, but from Fanti culture itself. In this scene, the props "bell" and "carpet" are part of Sekyi's effort to satirise the unnecessary Anglicization of those members of the Cape Coast elite Mrs Borɔfosɛm represents. Indeed, their graphic displacement in the Fanti speech seems to almost foreshadow Mrs Borɔfosɛm's rejection, in the final scene of *The Blinkards*, of all of the English cultural signifiers that she had once valued. Sekyi himself would later state that "thinking in English sometimes leads us into paths of expense and effort which are unnecessary. We can find all or most of all we want here now."[15] The linguistic syncretism at work in the examples mentioned above seems to reflect a pattern of concept-

blending which occurs in the diglossic terrains of Africa; as Hans-Jörg Schmid et al. have discussed, "the minds of African multilingual speakers […] seem to provide a fertile ground for the emergence of culturally blended concepts" (93–94). However, Sekyi's decision to deviate from such an expected pattern of conceptual syncretism, in order to employ such words in English, evidences his deliberate intention to accentuate cultural distinctiveness and to moderate the extent to which concept blending constitutes a potentially detrimental social relationship between English and Fanti.

In the conclusion to his lectures on the importance of the rehabilitation of Fanti in colonial Ghana, *The Meaning of the Expression 'Thinking in English'*, Kobina Sekyi maintains that the Fanti habit of "thinking in English"—or, indeed "speaking in English," in accordance with his perception that language functioned "as thought in words" (Baku 279)—

> takes us out of the normal course of our development, to our detriment […] and to the ultimate disadvantage of mankind in general […] hence 'thinking in English' is not likely to aid us either in our intercourse with the English or in our own development as a contented people.[16]

In his socio–linguistic and political writings, Kobina Sekyi often shared in the opinion common amongst nationalists in colonial Ghana, that the "use of Ghanaian languages in expressing Ghanaian identity and nationality was central to the nationalist struggle in the Gold Coast" (Saah and Baku 96). However, this tendency can be traced back to his earlier writings, such as *The Blinkards*, written in 1915 and first performed in 1916, in which the use of Fanti functions as a political instrument of resistance against the encroachment of the English language, and the customs and institutions Sekyi saw as inextricably related to it. The bilingual nature of *The Blinkards*, moreover, serves as a reminder to contemporary criticism that the so-called "multilingual turn" amounts to, in the words of Setiono Sugiharto, "a sheer denial of the vibrant multilingual practices" both *in* the West and, more importantly, in the postcolonial world (415). In an endeavor to address the as yet critically neglected, but

essential topic of bilingualism in Kobina Sekyi's work, I have shown in this article the many forms in which the bilingual strategies employed throughout *The Blinkards* evidence dialogue with the glottopolitics of his work.

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